

Advancing Your Career in Safety

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Introduction

One is often concerned about where the next opportunity for advancement may come from. It may be available within the organizational units of your current employer. It may become available by competing for positions with a different employer. It may come by invitation because you have developed yourself and demonstrated an appropriate level of knowledge, skills and experience. It may come through a planned process or through an opportunity that simply arises.

The question is whether you are keeping up with change, have a strategy for your own development, and continue to work to improve yourself. The purpose of this session is to address three aspects of career advancement. They include understanding and tracking trends and changes in or surrounding practice, establishing a process for keeping current and preparing for advancement, and understanding some of the factors that may affect advancement.

Trends Affecting Practice

There are two main groups of changes or trends that impact one's practice. One group involves changes in the contents of practice itself. Those changes may impact all positions in the field of practice or impact different levels within the practice. The second group involves changes in things surrounding practice and impact the way one practices. Both are important in being able to stay current and to advance in practice.

Trends within Practice

Convergence of Safety, Health and Environment. In the past, those involved in the safety profession worked in a narrow domain. Safety professionals focused on safety; industrial hygienists on health matters; and environmental practitioners on environmental affairs. All of these areas of practice continue to converge. Many employers have combined them into a single department. For smaller companies these roles are combined into a single, full-time position. The convergence is worldwide.

BCSP data supports this trend. A recent survey established that only 13% of all CSPs work in safety only. Nearly 45% have responsibility for safety and industrial hygiene. Over 40% have responsibility for safety, health and environment.

Broadening Range of Responsibilities. One of the unique characteristics of safety practice compared to many other fields is the breadth of knowledge that one must have in order to handle

the range of responsibilities. The range of responsibilities involved in safety practice continues to grow. One should note, however, that the distribution of time spent among those responsibilities can differ significantly. The table below shows a composite of practice based on data from people holding the CSP. The table lists the portion who hold a particular responsibility and also the portion of time spent on each responsibility.

<u>Responsibility</u>	<u>Percent Who Have Responsibility</u>	<u>Percent of Time on Responsibility</u>
Safety	89	42
Safety Engineering	50	4
Product Safety	17	1
Systems Safety	23	3
Risk Management	53	9
Industrial Hygiene	66	11
Occupational Health	44	3
Environmental Health	23	1
Public Health	10	0.5
Health Physics	10	0.6
Ergonomics	59	4
Fire Protection	51	5
Environmental – general	42	5
Environmental engineering	12	0.7
Hazardous Materials Management	41	2
Security	21	2
Other	10	5

Pushing Safety Deeper Into the Organization. Another trend involves moving safety deeper into the organization, particularly into work groups. The trend involves training work group leaders in safety matters and procedures and getting the work group to identify safety issues and hazards and initiating action to resolve them. This is in contrast to forwarding any safety problem to the safety department.

Leading Indicators vs. Training Indicators. Another trend is seeking leading indicators for safety rather than depending on accidents, injuries, illnesses and other training indicators of safety.

The Business Case for Safety. Another trend is identifying how safety contributes to the business bottom line. Examples include identifying productivity gains that result from preventive actions and process improvements that also reduce or eliminate hazards and minimize risks.

Moving Beyond Compliance. The safety focus of good companies goes well beyond complying with government and voluntary standards. The focus is on social responsibility, being a good neighbor and employer and valuing customers, communities and employees.

Risk-Based Decision Making. Much of the safety practice in the U.S. is based on prescriptive standards. Published standards are minimums to be exceeded. In some areas of practice and in other parts of the world, safety decision making is based on risk-based decision making. This practice is a form of performance standard. In many cases, the government standards are performance based and require those responsible for implementation to do so based on risk analysis and risk-based decisions. The risk-based decision making is often incorporated already at the worker and supervisor level of work groups.

Understanding and Influencing Individual Behavior. Over the last decade or so, an important trend is behavior-based safety. This approach to implementing safe practices involves an understanding of human behavior and provides a means for affecting safe performance.

Establishing a Safety Culture. Another important trend in safety has been a focus on organizational behavior and creating an organizational climate that includes a commitment to safety and gaining commitment and participation in safety at all levels of the organization and among contractors and service providers.

Effective Communications. The importance of communication has also been growing. Communicating through written documents extends to verbal and electronic communications. Communication methods have expanded. Communication in all directions throughout an organization is essential for achieving safety in the workplace.

Leading vs. Responding. A number of the previous trends are manifested in this trend. The safety professional today must be a leader rather than a responder. Finding ways to be proactive to achieve safety rather than reacting to unsafe events is more important than ever. The safety professional must be able to impact the management structure of an organization in order to achieve safety goals.

Trends Surrounding Practice

Changes in Technology. The rate of technological change continues at a rapid pace. Clearly, the greatest trend has been in computer technology and its impact on the way information is captured, stored and used. Technological change has impacted virtually every form of instrumentation and the capture, analysis and interpretation of physical and chemical data. Technology change has affected the structure of organizations and the way work is accomplished. To progress in virtually any field, one must keep up with technological changes.

The Global Economy. The world continues to shrink. Business is global. The shift from a local to a national and an international economy has many impacts for practice. Where one turns for human and technical resources has changed. The shift has created diversity in the work place and in commerce. An impact for safety practice is dealing with variations in culture, language, procedures and hazards.

The Multi-Language Workplace. One of the impacts both nationally and globally is the need to operate in more than one language. Clearly, the most rapid change in the U.S. has involved the increase in Spanish speaking workers. But that is not the only change. In California, in addition to the Hispanic workforce, there are areas where Chinese, Russian, Rumanian, Arabic and other languages are now part of safety practice.

Understanding and Impacting Business. Another trend that impacts safety from outside of safety itself is greater pressure to find ways to impact the bottom line of business. That trend requires the ability to read a financial statement, to be able to deal with such business terms as return on investment. A safety professional must be able to plan and organize safety programs to demonstrate a contribution to the metrics of business performance.

Changes in Work Methods. The old ways of managing work continue to change. Changes involve a trend toward increased participation in work group goals and performance. Collaboration has replaced command and control approaches.

An Approach for Action

Through an organized process of analysis, planning, and actions, one can continue to keep up with changes in safety practice and the world that surrounds practice. This section will review a five-step approach for managing how you stay current and how you can position yourself for advancement in your career. It takes some work. As has been suggested by some, you need to reserve part of your work time for developing yourself. As a result, you can improve yourself and add value for your employer.

Step 1. Assess Where You Are

This step focuses on two elements. The first is identifying what is changing. The second is conducting a self evaluation to identify whether you have slipped behind and need to catch up.

In identifying what is changing, focus on the two elements summarized above. Look for changes and trends in professional safety practice itself. Review the publications, literature and continuing education courses being offered. Ask yourself whether you know about a topic and whether the topic is one you need to know about for safety practice in general or for your current position. Make a list of newer safety topics for which you have limited knowledge.

Similarly, take time to evaluate the processes, practices and technologies that surround you. Make a list. Organize it in some manner. For example, list computer technologies that have changed or those you are not familiar with. List business methods that you don't know much about but are in use around you. Identify other languages or cultural areas that may impact your practice.

Then evaluate your own strengths and weaknesses. Referring to your lists, identify which changes within and surrounding your practice are important and rate your own knowledge and skills for each.

This will establish where you are at in the world that is impacting your professional safety practice.

Step 2. Establish a Professional Development Plan

The next step is to establish a plan for your personal development. You will want to start by defining goals for yourself. The goals may involve preparing for a higher level position. The goals may involve specialization and becoming more proficient in a particular area of practice. The goals may involve simply staying current with change within the safety profession. The goals may involve identifying new things to learn to be able to function effectively in today's business world and in your workplace. They may involve developing or enhancing your skills. The goals may be organized as short-term or long-term goals or a combination.

After identifying your personal and professional goals, you will want to select items from your lists to focus on. Be sure to address items related directly to professional practice and items that enhance your overall knowledge and skills. Some advise that having a solid set of basic knowledge and skills in working with people, communication, work methods and processes, etc. are most important in the long run. The reason is that at a time of unemployment, core knowledge and skills provide flexibility in regaining employment. Focusing continually on the changes in safety practice alone may limit your ability to advance.

Then, after having identified what to focus on, you will want to define what method you will use to fill those needs. There are a number of ways to learn. They range from self study through researching literature and reading on one's own, to continuing education courses, seeking an advanced degree in an area of interest, or pursuing and achieving certification in a particular area.

Obviously, a factor in setting a plan is to identify what organizations or resources can help you. You will also want to identify what costs are involved and how those costs might be paid for. You may need to conduct research through the Internet, speak with colleagues or supervisors about sources they have used, or search in other ways to find possible solutions to meet your needs.

Step 3. Execute Your Plan

With your completed plan, you are left with executing the plan. You will have to purchase the materials and courses. You may have to file an application or enrollment form. You will have to set a schedule for completion, based on your goals, focus areas, schedule and funds. At this point, it is important to complete that portion of your plan you have defined for a calendar year or other time increment. It may involve reviewing a conference publication to ensure that you attend those sessions in line with your plan.

Step 4. Monitor Change

A continuous step is monitoring the changes within your practice and those that surround your practice. You will want to collect information that crosses your desk and park it where you can get back to it for further review. It is better to compile information about change that may be of value on a regular basis, rather than trying to compile that in one intense activity.

Step 5. Repeat Steps 1 Through 4

The final step is completing Steps 1 through 4 on a regular basis. It is helpful to establish a regular time to do this. Perhaps it is part of a personal update at the beginning of each year or around your birthday. Perhaps it is in anticipation of the budgetary cycle of your employer so that you are prepared to seek financial support for training or conference attendance. Perhaps it is in anticipation of your annual appraisal process.

What Makes a Difference?

If you are trying to advance in your career, you will want to know what characteristics make a difference. You will want to know if you are able to compete. This section reviews information derived from salary studies of individuals holding the Certified Safety Professional certification.

Experience

Although it seems somewhat obvious, experience does play an important role in being able to advance. A study of many job ads appearing in *Professional Safety* over the years identified that about 90% of the ads included specific periods of experience required or desired for applicants. Salary studies of CSPs show that the number of years of experience in professional safety practice has a significant impact on pay. Experience may be one of the requirements to qualify for a particular position.

Education

Similarly, education level and field of study are also important in competing for a position or for advancing. About 90% of the job ads in *Professional Safety* include a requirement for a degree.

A position may have specific requirements, such as a degree in a particular area of study, such as safety, industrial hygiene, engineering, business, etc. Salary studies have shown that in professional safety practice there is a greater interest in the generalist than in one who specializes. More positions seek individuals who can handle breadth compared to positions seeking depth in a specific area of practice. While there is a growing number of people with degrees in safety or a closely allied field entering safety practice, many people enter from other backgrounds. Having a safety degree is likely to provide an advantage.

In addition, the level of education can also be important. The more senior the position, the more likely that there is at least a preference for someone with an advanced degree. One should recognize that today, about one in every three high school graduates go on to college. Given that level of competition, many have chosen to pursue an advanced degree in order to be better able to compete for their next position.

Salary data from CSPs indicates that educational level does impact pay. The data also shows that about 45% of all CSPs have advanced degrees, a significant increase over the last 15 years.

Certification

Achieving a quality, recognized certification is important when competing for positions in the safety field. Over half of the job ads in *Professional Safety* identify certification or a particular certification as a required or desired qualification for the position.

Data compiled from a variety of salary studies by various organizations demonstrate the value of a quality certification. Quality is noted by the accreditation the certification holds from an independent, third party organization that sets standards for certifications. The most recent study of CSPs when compared to results from other sources for a range of safety practitioners indicates that the average CSP earns nearly \$30,000 more annually than does someone with no certification in the field.

Leadership

Perhaps one of the most significant impacts on pay for safety professionals is supervising others in safety practice. When the pay of those supervising others is compared to those who do not, it is very clear that the impact is the single most important factor in pay increases. In retrospect, that may seem somewhat obvious, since most of us recognize that those with supervisory responsibility get paid more. What is not quite so obvious is the overall impact that supervision has on pay when compared to experience, education and certification.

Because the effect of becoming a supervisor of peers is important, one should find ways to learn leadership and incorporate that as a goal in a professional development plan. The opportunities for leadership may come from volunteering in your community, church, or for a professional or other organization. Leadership can come through reading and self study of the wide range of literature on the subject, from continuing education courses or from experience-based training programs. The opportunities provided directly by an employer may be limited. Opportunities to develop leadership skills through voluntary services may be more readily available

Summary

You can influence the likelihood of advancing your career. You need to take charge of your own future. With the lack of stability in business today, few can rely on their employer to take care of their career advancement. You can be ready for advancement opportunities by monitoring what is changing, establishing your own professional development plan, and by understanding what may make a difference in your opportunities. This session has provided information that may help you improve your chances for success.

Bibliography

BCSP Academic Database,
www.bcsp.org/bcsp/index.php?option=com_acsearch&task=section&action=view&Itemid=120

Career Guide to the Safety Profession, ASSE Foundation and Board of Certified Safety Professionals (Available on the web sites of both organizations.)